



Session: Multi-level governance to enhance integrated climate action (A1)

Cities and Regions Talanoa Dialogues and multilevel governance

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Abstract:

Subnational climate governance has been making inroads into the intergovernmental process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in an impressive manner. At the twenty-third Conference of the Parties (COP) held in Bonn, Germany in November 2017, the Climate Summit of Local and Regional Leaders organised by ICLEI adopted the Bonn-Fiji Commitment by acclamation. One of the key proposals from this landmark document calls for convening of local, regional and national dialogues which integrate all levels of government with a view to identifying forward-looking ways to strengthen the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). This policy ask was directly accepted by Parties to the UNFCCC and was institutionalised as part of the modalities for the Talanoa Dialogue as contained in decision 1/CP.23 of the COP. This paper analyses the linkages between international and subnational climate governance with the Cities and Regions Talanoa Dialogues as the most recent example and provides insights as to how subnational climate governance will proceed in the post-Paris international climate regime.

Keywords:

Climate change, governance, linkages, Paris Agreement, policy

1. Introduction

There is a plethora of terms describing the current landscape of global climate governance, but the one aspect that encompasses all these would be polycentricity (Jordan, Huitema, Schoenefeld, van Asselt, & Forster, 2018). The UNFCCC intergovernmental process remains a Party-driven process but it has been opening a window of opportunities for non-Party stakeholders such as cities and regions ever wider (Pattberg, Chan, Sanderink, & Widerberg, 2018). One of the key propositions of the theory of polycentric governance is the ability of actors to mutually adjust their course of action to complement each other (Jordan et al., 2018). What follows suit in this polycentric governance architecture is a web of interlinked actors and initiatives that pursue common or similar goals (Pattberg et al., 2018).

Subnational climate governance has been making inroads into the intergovernmental process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in an impressive manner. At the twenty-third Conference of the Parties (COP) held in Bonn, Germany in November 2017, the Climate Summit of Local and Regional Leaders organised by ICLEI adopted the Bonn-Fiji Commitment by acclamation. Consisting of three key components, the Commitment displays a number of climate actions already underway and will be undertaken by local and regional leaders, followed by policy asks to national and international policymakers for enhancing the inclusion of local and regional governments for implementing the Paris Agreement. The last part of the Commitment contains a number of concrete initiatives launched at COP 23 in the domain of subnational climate governance. What is driving this momentum for climate action by cities and regions? The answer may be found in the rapidly evolving governance landscape of the post-Paris climate regime that can be characterised as polycentric (Jordan et al., 2018).

The rapid entry into force of the Paris Agreement in November 2016 heralded a new chapter of climate governance which was further solidified by the Conference of the Parties (COP) in the form of the launching of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (Chan, Brandi, & Bauer, 2016). However, criticism persists on the international climate governance coordinated by the UNFCCC, maintaining that it is too slow (Victor, 2011). The global climate governance architecture, created in 1992 with the UNFCCC, has yet to this day managed to curb global emissions (UNEP, 2017) to a level that is consistent with the long-term goal of the Paris Agreement (Jordan et al., 2013; UNEP, 2017).

This paper applies polycentric climate governance as a conceptual framework to analyse the constantly changing landscape of subnational climate governance. In doing so, the author focuses on the case study of the Cities and Regions Talanoa Dialogues initiative (ICLEI, 2018a) launched by ICLEI in February 2018 at the ninth World Urban Forum. This case study offers a wide array of policy insights on how SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda can create synergy each other.

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2. Conceptual framework: polycentric climate governance

Observations have been made on the uncertainty of whether international climate governance would deliver on its promises purely through the Party-driven process of the UNFCCC (Okereke, Bulkeley, & Schroeder, 2009). Some argued that the international climate regime needs to harness synergy through multilevel, multi-stakeholder cooperation (Rayner, 2010). In 2010, through her pioneering article on polycentric governance, Elinor Ostrom maintained that such multilevel, multi-stakeholder cooperation is sprouting up at an increasing rate to complement the international climate regime (2010). Key to her argument was the view that the international climate regime could benefit greatly from the multilevel, multi-stakeholder-led climate governance architecture that was emerging (Ostrom, 2010). Ostrom used the term 'polycentric' in order to describe this dynamic pattern that seemed to have originated from local level bottom-up initiatives (2010). She described polycentric governance as,

multiple governing authorities at different scales rather than a mono-centric unit. Each unit within a polycentric system exercises considerable independence to make norms and rules within a specific domain (such as a family, a firm, a local government, a network of local governments, a state or province, a region, a national government, or an international regime).

(Ostrom, 2010, p. 552)

Countless others have followed in her footsteps to further define features that constitute this polycentric climate governance. The metaphor of the 'Cambrian explosion' to describe the rapidly emerging phenomenon of bottom-up initiatives by non-Party stakeholders is a famous example (Keohane & Victor, 2011). Although this polycentric pattern of climate governance became somewhat more pronounced in the recent past decade (Falkner, 2016) following the failure of the Copenhagen Conference in 2009, the polycentricity of climate governance has long been a fixture of multilevel climate governance pioneered by cities and regions supported by city networks from the early 1990s (ICLEI, 2018c).

3. Subnational climate governance: linkages between urbanisation and climate agenda

The evolution of polycentric climate governance that has come to be characterised by some scholars as 'transnational' climate governance (Andonova, Betsill, & Bulkeley, 2009; Betsill & Bulkeley, 2004; Bulkeley et al., 2014; Kenneth, 2012; Toly, 2008) is well captured in ICLEI's recent submission (ICLEI, 2018c) to the current and incoming Presidencies of the Conference of Parties (COP) in relation to the Talanoa Dialogue. The Talanoa Dialogue was originally mandated by the COP as 'facilitative dialogue' to

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be convened in 2018 to take stock of collective progress of Parties towards the Paris Agreement long-term temperature goal (UNFCCC, 2016). In 2017, led by the Fijian COP 23 Presidency, the COP decided to have this mandated event known as the ‘Talanoa’ Dialogue in accordance with the Pacific tradition of holding an open, inclusive, transparent dialogues and launched it as a year-long process to start from January 2018 to have it culminate at a political phase at COP 24 in December 2018 (UNFCCC, 2018).

Established in 1990 as a network of cities, regions, towns and municipalities, ICLEI has been the leader of subnational climate governance in the international climate governance regime in its capacity as the focal point of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) to the UNFCCC. In 1991, ICLEI launched its first attempt to orchestrate ambitious climate actions by cities through its “Urban CO2 Reduction Project,” connecting 14 cities in North America and Europe (ICLEI, 2018c). Following this successful global campaign, ICLEI launched in 1993 its Cities for Climate Protection programme at the first Municipal Leaders Summit on Climate Change (ICLEI, 2018c). At the first Conference of the Parties (COP) in 1995, ICLEI played a key role in establishing the LGMA constituency as one of the key constituency groups officially accredited to the UNFCCC and admitted to the COP (ICLEI, 2018c). ICLEI became the focal point of the LGMA constituency and has remained so since then (ICLEI, 2017). In 2005 when the Kyoto Protocol entered into force, more than 1000 mayors from the United States announced their commitment to climate action (ICLEI, 2018c). In 2007, the Local Government Climate Roadmap was launched by ICLEI, playing a pivotal role in the adoption of relevant COP decisions in 2010 and 2013 that conferred recognition of the role of subnational actors in the global climate regime. This led to a successful engagement in the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) negotiations (ICLEI, 2018c), which laid a solid foundation for having the Paris Agreement preambular language on the importance of multilevel governance.

Years of climate advocacy work led by ICLEI on raising the awareness of bottom-up climate initiatives and the significant contributions made by local and regional governments in closing the emission gap bore fruit with the adoption of the Paris Agreement (ICLEI, 2018c). The Paris Agreement recognises the importance of engagement of government at all levels for addressing climate change and it marked one of the major breakthroughs in subnational climate governance in 2015 (ICLEI, 2018c). At COP 15 in 2009, the Copenhagen World Catalogue of Local Climate Commitments with 3000 entries was released, which evolved into the Mexico City Pact and its carbon Cities Climate Registry in 2010, followed by the Durban Adaptation Charter in 2011 (ICLEI, 2018c). At the 2014 UN Climate Summit convened by the UN Secretary General, ICLEI actively contributed to the creation of the Compact of Mayors which evolved into the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy in 2017, merging with the European Covenant of Mayors (ICLEI, 2018c).

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Other forms of polycentric governance instruments include creation of global standards by city networks and launching of initiatives that are being supported by international and subnational stakeholders alike. Notable examples that emerged in the subnational climate governance space include the Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventories (GPC) (ICLEI, 2018b) and the Cities and Regions Talanoa Dialogues (ICLEI, 2018a). The GPC is a joint project by ICLEI, World Resources Institute (WRI) and C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) which provides a global reporting standard for cities and regions to consistently measure and report GHG emissions (ICLEI, 2018b). The Cities and Regions Talanoa Dialogues is a newly launched multi-stakeholder initiative led by ICLEI as a direct response of the urban community to the COP 23 Fijian Presidency's call for a grand coalition of non-Party stakeholders to achieve the Paris Agreement goal (ICLEI, 2018a). Led by ICLEI and having on board the UN Habitat and Global Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate as special partners, the initiative is being implemented in collaboration with the UNFCCC and the COP 23 Presidency (ICLEI, 2018a).

4. Conclusions

The adoption of the Paris Agreement seems to have validated Ostrom's prediction. The Paris Agreement at its heart contains the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which are to be revised every five years in the light of different national circumstances, representing a progress from the then current NDC of that Party (Robert & Michael, 2016; UNFCCC, 2016). The adopting decision by the COP of the Paris Agreement contains a number of mandates that pertain to the importance of mobilising climate action by non-Party stakeholders (Hale, 2016; UNFCCC, 2016) which further supports the Paris Agreement's paradigm shift towards polycentricity.

It remains to be seen what the added-value of all these dynamic initiatives would be for achieving the Paris Agreement goal. Ostrom argued that bottom-up initiatives create a positive momentum which have a significant impact on addressing climate change (Ostrom, 2010). She further observed that this trend of multilevel, multi-stakeholder initiatives that are characterised as polycentric climate governance were set to grow in the future (Ostrom, 2010). There is now doubt that the recognition conferred by the Paris Agreement on the importance of engagements of government at all levels will play a pivotal role as a modus operandi of how cities and regions further contribute to the implementation of NDCs in the coming years. ICLEI, in its capacity as the LGMA constituency focal point, is well advised to start mapping out its strategic engagement plans with actors like the UNFCCC. In doing so, the focus should be placed on coordinating an effective mechanism for subnational engagement at the global climate governance

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regime that is still based on a Party-driven approach but is ever more widening its window of opportunity for local and regional governments.

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